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Building Blocks of Effective Regulation: Day to day transparency, accountability and simplicity

Ministry of Public Health Takes Major Steps with a Private Health Center Information and Communication Center

Finding and knowing the standards on how to operate a private sector health facility was impossible before the Private Health Center Information and Communication Center, nicknamed the “One Stop Door” was created within the Directorate of Private Sector Coordination (DPSC). This information gap made advance business planning and proper hospital design impossible as there was nowhere to find applicable standards and requirements. And it made a routine monitoring visit a tense event as a hospital could be penalized for not being in compliance with standards it has no way to know. The standards and requirements were simply not available; not to the public and not even to MOH staff. As was said by various persons, it would take months to collect the standards and requirements from all the MOPH departments. It would be hard for anyone outside the MOH being able to do this. Now all the MoPH standards and requirements are indexed and catalogued for easy reference.

Recognizing the substantial presence of the private sector in delivery of health products and services, as steward of the Afghanistan health sector, the MoPH adopted a National Policy for Private Health Sector for 2009-2014. It sets guiding principles and policy objectives that include strengthening its role as steward of the health sector and its governance by promoting transparency and accountability, simplicity and efficiency among others.

To identify steps to realize these objectives and fulfill these principles, in November 2012 the USAID funded Health Policy Project assessed the Afghan MoPH capacity to implement a new law on private health center regulation and the National Policy for Private Health Sector. A significant finding was that there is no place to find information on the standards of operation, the requirements for licensing, how to get a license and how performance is to be monitored and the requirements enforced. Private sector health facilities and those considering

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establishing one faced a weakly defined, poorly implemented and enforced set of requirements and standards. One could not even find a copy of these in the MOH, an example of lack of transparency that is hard to beat and is unfortunately the status quo in Afghanistan and in most developing countries.

It is well known that the private sector requires clear guidance on the environment within which it must invest and work. And the rules and standards must not be so cumbersome or complicated that they may be subject to different interpretations by different MoPH departments, individuals, businesses or civil society organizations. Without such transparency, accountability and simplicity, the private sector cannot estimate the returns on the investments it must make to increase the quality, quantity and coverage of the health services it offers and thus fully partner with the MOH in serving Afghans.

What was needed was a “one stop shop” or center, for information to solve this problem of lack of transparency. MoPH took the important step to create the Private Sector Information and Communications Center (ICC) Office within the Directorate of Private Sector Coordination (DPSC) under the Director General for Policy and Planning. The ICC is now part of the MOPH organizational structure or *taskheel* as it is called in Dari which also means it is on budget. Informally called the “One Stop Door”, it has a web site where key information and forms can be downloaded, an email, a dedicated phone line and staff to answer questions and guide hospital and clinic operators seeking to establish facilities in Afghanistan and those interested in PPP opportunities. This is important because for good business planning and establishment and proper operations can only happen with necessary information. Now the information is a key stroke away.

A DPSC team has collected all the laws, regulations, forms and instructions that relate to the private health sector and has catalogued and indexed these for retrieval by the type of health facility. This work was most critical in order to clarify and simplify what regulations and standards govern each type of facility and how each should operate and by which the MOPH will monitor them. In addition to the web site, the email and phone line, a documents manager has been hired to assist interested persons with finding the right information and directions to the relevant office within the Ministry. An Afghan woman trained in business holds this position, the first of its kind in the ministry. And senior DPSC staff are available for further assistance and face to face meetings. It is a strategic objective of MOPH to improve the regulatory environment. The work of cataloging and indexing the regulations and standards and making this information available to all through the ICC is a building block of any system and is a priority intervention. Making this type of information available to all who are interested is possible and can be readily done.